

Clean Fire

BY KATHARINE HILL

Illustrated by W. B. King

THE wind brought a waif sheet of newspaper to Red O'Brien's feet one day, and he learned from it that American soldiers were on the fighting-line in France. The news did not interest Red much. He had hoped, as he vaguely caught at the discolored scrap, for some word of the gang, or perhaps a picture of a chicken—any chicken, for he was not particular.

Yet the war, had it come five years earlier, would have saved Red O'Brien, as it would have saved many another man in the Big House with him, as it is saving, from disasters never to be known, thousands of lads for whom it has not come too late. The very qualities that got Red into trouble—an itch for adventure, utter recklessness of danger, the need to be at grips with an equal enemy, and an actual touch of "divine unrest"—were those which, had he been lucky, must have made a hero of him.

He hadn't wanted the money nearly so much as he had wanted the excitement. The other fellows had laid all the plans, located the booty, timed the attempt. At the last moment they had asked big-muscled Red to join them, tempting him with the possibility of police interference.

Red hated the police with a good hate, a hate so clean and fierce that it was almost a noble sentiment. Of course he would have had his share of the spoils had the outcome been different; but the opportunity for fighting came, and Red fought too well—wouldn't stop fighting, indeed, until he was overpowered, while his pals made a pitiful getaway, and divided the money without him.

Of his crime—robbery with violence—the law takes a severe view, which is doubtless necessary for the protection of society. Yet robbery with violence may very well indicate a lesser degree of moral turpitude

than robbery without it. Red O'Brien was a gentleman, compared to his associates; but while they escaped punishment, he was convicted and sentenced to ten years in the penitentiary.

He was twenty-five years old now, and had served half his time. He had earned no diminution of sentence. Never since his committal, except on Christmas and Thanksgiving Days, had he been allowed to eat enough to satisfy his young wolf's appetite. He had had to work at an uninspiring task of brush-making, in an evil-smelling room with other crop-headed zebras. He had never taken part in, or even seen, a game of baseball, or any other game. He had never seen a play, for it had been his atrocious luck to occupy the cooler on the rare occasions when a large-hearted manager brought his company to give a performance for the convicts.

The profession of patriotism he associated with that of religion—despicable insincerities both, resorted to at the price of self-respect for the attainment of privileges. He was cut off from everything wholesome, pleasant, fine, or beautiful. Even the music in chapel failed to reach him, for he happened to be tone-deaf.

Sometimes, to be sure, a party of visitors—amateur sociologists with "uplift" for their watchword—would be shown through the prison. They were usually women, and hardly ever, by the perversity of natural selection, were they pretty; but they probably thought their pitying, toothy smiles a solace to the men. Red O'Brien hated them more than any other incident of jail life. When the eyes of the keepers were turned in some other direction, he would look at the gentle visitors so insolently that their sweet aplomb would momentarily desert them.

At night, sullen, savage, miserable, he would stretch his long limbs on a bed too

narrow, too short, and too hard, and thrash about until sleep came.

The war was a remote and bloodless thing to Red, but there were men in the Big House who cared, who begged for scraps of news in these days as they would beg for tobacco, who were willing to trade bread for pieces of newspaper. The disappointing sheet that Red picked up nettled him, that evening, a double supper. Perhaps it was an overloaded stomach that kept him awake into the small hours.

From time to time he turned over, scratched himself, sat up, and swore. All the thwarted energy of his twenty-five years seemed to be pounding through his great body; rest was unthinkable. His strength clamored to be used, threatened explosion, like a full head of steam throttled down.

And as his flesh was tortured by the close walls of the cell, pressing on him, prohibiting any free movement, his soul was tormented more cruelly by the suffocating knowledge that five more years of this lay before him. Five years! The five he had wrestled through stretched backward like eternity itself. And there were to be five more! He began to bite his fists.

II

HE caught his hand from his teeth suddenly; above the familiar, restless noises of the cell-block a new sound had reached his ears. A bell—yes, the fire-bell!

Twice it swung clear and loud; then it was drowned, for Red, in the shouts and catcalls from the awakened men around him.

"Fire! Fire!" they yelled. "Let us out!"

Some were really panic-stricken. It is a severe test of nerve to hear an alarm of fire, not knowing whence it comes, knowing only that one is powerless to stir. They began to get the smell of smoke in the cell-block. By shouting from one face of the oblong to another, they learned that the keeper who was usually stationed in the corridor had disappeared.

"Is he on your side, you up there—you over there—you down there? No? He's saved his skin and left us to burn, the—"

Red had sprung out of bed and was madly wrenching at the bars of his door—an utterly hopeless effort, since it was built to withstand many times his strength. Others were rattling, too, and most of them

yelling. The warden, who now appeared at the gate of the corridor, had to shout at the top of his voice to make himself heard over the unholy din.

"Shut up!" he roared. "You're in no danger. The fire's in the women's wing, two city blocks away from here!"

As soon as his voice was heard—the voice of the man outside, the man who could use his eyes and hands and feet, the man who *knew*—there had fallen a tense and breathless silence. He was speaking on Red's side of the cell-block. Red, looking out eagerly, saw that the warden, though he mastered himself, was frightened. His voice betrayed it, too, now that he had no longer to strain every quality but noise out of it in order to make himself heard.

"I want men to fight the fire," he said. "I'm going to let out about twenty of you, to help!"

He moved down the corridor, followed by the keeper, who paused at each cell the warden indicated, and released its inmate. The clamor had broken out again now—not so loud, however, and of a different nature.

"Let me out, captain!"

"Let me out—I'm used to fires, I am!"

"My girl's in there, sir; you gotta let me out!"

The warden walked on, paying little heed to what they said, making his own decisions according to the physique and the record of each man. He hesitated a moment in front of Red's door. Those shoulders and forearms were of the sort he needed, but O'Brien was an unruly fellow.

He met squarely the blue Celtic eyes under the flame of tossed curls—it was nearly time for a hair-cut, and Red's head was almost as bright as the fire that the warden had left. The eyes appealed, challenged, promised, and demanded.

The warden jerked his thumb, and a moment later Red had slipped into his place in the file of men who were to fight the fire.

The Big House had always more guests than it could accommodate. An addition was building, but meanwhile expedients had to be found for housing the overflow, and one expedient had been the warden's own. He had turned his women prisoners out of the wing of the stone prison that had been theirs, and had put them into wooden barracks, pending the completion

of the new quarters. He didn't think there was much danger of their trying to get away.

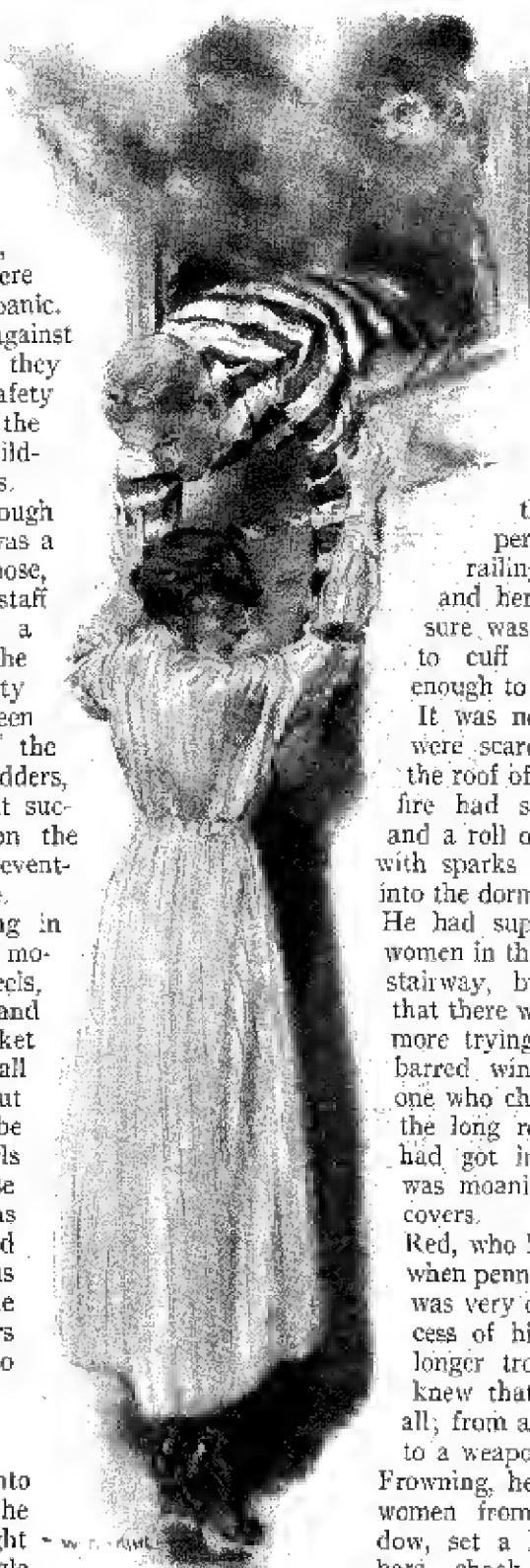
To-night the barracks were burning, and there were no fire-escapes, and half the women were out of their heads with panic. They pressed screaming against the windows, from which they might have jumped to safety if it had not been for the bars; the long frame buildings had only two stories.

There was water enough in the river, and there was a small fire-engine and hose, with which the prison staff were already sending a steady stream into the flames. There were plenty of buckets, and it had been the warden's idea that the men, standing on ladders, should empty a constant succession of buckets upon the roof and walls, thus preventing the spread of the fire.

Red O'Brien, standing in the darkness there for a moment, rocking on his heels, considered the situation and decided against the bucket brigade. That was all very well, he thought, but something ought to be done about those girls first. Listen to those screams! He winced as he heard them, and grinned a savage, nervous grin. Then he left the group around the ladders and darted swiftly into the barracks.

III

It was easy to get into the lower hall, because the women who had fought their way down the single staircase rushed on out of doors, while those on the staircase pushed and jammed and — screamed.



LEANING AS FAR OUT OF THE WINDOW AS HE DARED, HE LET HER DROP TO THE GRASS

Red took one look at that packed stair, and knew that even he could never get up it; so he swung himself up outside the railing, hoping that it would not break down under the pressure of the women's bodies.

He worked his way to the end of the well in the upper hall, where the railing entered the wall, and here, where the pressure was least, he managed to cuff back the women enough to climb over.

It was no wonder the hens were scared; he thought, as the roof of the shed where the fire had started crashed in, and a roll of black smoke shot with sparks moved majestically into the dormitory ahead of him. He had supposed that all the women in the world were on the stairway, but it seemed now that there were almost as many more trying to get out of the barred windows. There was one who charged up and down the long room, and one who had got into bed again and was moaning from under the covers.

Red, who had been so restless when penned into his own cell, was very calm now. The excess of his own strength no longer troubled him, for he knew that he would need it all; from a cross it had turned to a weapon at need.

Frowning, he brushed aside the women from the nearest window, set a hand to the warm bars, shook them tentatively, and then almost laughed. This thing was going to be too easy! The steel doors of the men's cells, set in steel, riveted with

steel, had made a barrier against which his strength was as ineffective as a kitten's; but these bars of old iron, roughly fastened into the wooden frame of the window—why, getting the better of them was simply child's play!

He gripped the bars and pulled; then jerked abruptly the other way. Stopping to take a deep breath, he suddenly shot his arms out straight before him, with the whole of his hundred and eighty pounds' weight behind the push. Red almost lost his balance as the entire outer framework of the window, with the bars, came away together.

It was now that he really had to fight, to keep the avalanche of women who wished to jump out, now that the way was clear, from breaking their necks and duplicating the horror of the staircasc. He may have blackened some eyes in the scuffle, but it was understood, presently, that he was in command.

Taking one woman at a time, he gripped her just under the arms, and, leaning as far out of the window as he dared, let her drop a matter of eight feet or so to the grass. It was back-breaking work, but in a moment or two he had help. A ladder was set up outside, the burly principal keeper swung himself over the sill, and the women were passed out quickly and safely. Even of those crowded at the stair-head, some were persuaded to leave by the shorter way.

When they were all out, Red jumped from the window himself and stood oil to look at the burning barracks. He was hot and breathless, his hands were torn, and his arms and legs ached; but he was happy with an exalted passion of happiness such as he had never known. It was not because he had saved life; at the moment that fact meant little to him. For this hour he had escaped from the sordid, gray life of the jail, and had plunged into an elemental conflict with the clean and splendid thing that is fire—man's oldest servant, most redoubtable enemy, and nearest friend.

The barracks must go; it was clear that nothing could be done but to prevent further damage. Great, yellow sheets of flame roared up into the black sky, where the stars were dazzled out. The fiery torrents shook and curled and wavered like banners; multitudinous sparks streamed and gushed and faded.

For the first time in five years Red O'Brien was looking at beauty, and doubtless this had a part in the strange exaltation that was upon him. But he could not formulate his feelings; he could only pick at his sore hands and mutter, "Gee!" and again, "Gee!"

The warden found him, clapped him on the back, all but cried upon his shoulder. As Red had guessed, the old man had been badly rattled. Between the jammed staircase and the barred windows he had seen no hope for his wretched charges, and the man who had saved them seemed to him to have worked a miracle.

Others came up to praise Red—blubbering girls and keepers genial beyond recognition. And then a white-faced matron strung them all tense again with a terrible cry:

"My Gawd, Mr. Rogers, there's Carrie Green in the cooler, and I clean forgot her to this minute!"

"Gimme the key!" said Red. "Where is your cooler?"

He gave no one else a chance to ask questions or to form a plan of rescue. For the hour he was clothed with a kind of authority, even before the warden, that made them obey him unhesitatingly.

"It's the door at the end of the dormitory—farthest from the fire. But you can't make it now, boy! The stairs are burning!"

And fire was streaming from the window that Red had forced; yet he ran in, through choking smoke, up the stairs, empty now except for tiny blue curls of flame upon the outer edges. He caught a blanket from a bed and emptied a water-pitcher over it, then unlocked the door of the little dark hole used for the punishment of solitary confinement.

There was a girl there, sure enough, huddled on the floor, shaking, silent. Red was grateful to her for not screaming. He bundled her in his wet blanket, fell rather than ran down the stairs, won to the fresh air, and, with his burden, toppled.

IV

For an hour Red had been released from prison—not only actually, but spiritually. For an hour he had ceased to be a convict and regained the status of a man. The afterglow of that great hour persisted into the days that followed. Warden, keepers, and chaplain looked on him with new eyes,

addressed him with a new tone in their voices. Something like self-respect struggled up in his soul to meet their tacit acknowledgment of his manhood.

And then, gradually but inevitably, the glow faded. The prison routine took Red again; the passage of days dulled the impressions he had received and made; the old rough, contemptuous ring came back into the orders given him. He was lumped with the others again, and his achievement was forgotten.

He himself, at work in the brush-shop through endless days, completely lost touch with the stirring experience that had been



RED WAS ABOUT TO LET HIS GAZE DRIFT PAST HER IN SEARCH OF A FAR DIFFERENT FIGURE, WHEN THEIR EYES MET

his. He had only the memory that once, for an hour, something had happened to him that had seemed great at the time. He could not recapture even a shadow of the exaltation he had felt.

"No use saying anything to the man," the warden had remarked to the chaplain on the morning after the fire; "because, of course, nothing may come of it, but I'm lunching with the Governor to-morrow, and I shall have a good deal to say to him about last night. You might write out your own account of O'Brien's conduct, and I'll show him that, too. I see you must have spoken strongly to some of the newspaper lads, from the story in the paper."

It was a good lunch, and the Governor, who had a son in France, was in a frame of mind to thrill to stories of heroism, to rate valor and coolness highly, and to pooh-pooh a little boyish exuberance such as had sent Red to jail. He thought that ten years was a long time to stay in prison, and that five years was quite enough for the offense in question. He promised to take the case under advisement; and some three weeks later—they had forgotten by then, in the Big House, that there had ever been a fire—he signed a pardon for James O'Brien, which happened to be Red's correct name.

The warden sent for Red, broke the news, congratulated him, and shook hands heartily. The chaplain came in, beaming through his spectacles, and said it was no more than the brave fellow deserved. Even the detested principal keeper clapped Red on the back with a grin, and a "Here's hoping we never meet again, O'Brien!"—a stale prison quip which is politer than it sounds.

Red was back again, miraculously, in the atmosphere of appreciation and friendliness that he had thought lost forever, and he was to go out of the prison at twelve o'clock. He didn't really believe that he was going to be free, although he knew it with certain surface sections of his mind; but he understood the good-will around him, and liked it.

"Here's twenty-five dollars," said the warden. He and the chaplain had each added something to the usual outgoing present of a five-dollar bill. "And here's the address of a gentleman who will give you a job. If there's anything else you'd like to ask, just speak up."

A sudden thought flashed across Red's mind, and he spoke.

"That girl—" he said. "Could I see her, do you suppose, sir—to sort of say good-by?"

"Which particular damsel do you mean? You saved about forty-seven of them, to the best of my recollection."

"The one that was in the cooler," Red explained.

To him it seemed that the girl in the cooler was the only one that he had really rescued. He had risked something to get her out; had burned himself rather painfully, and had known at least one moment when he had not been at all sure that he was going to get through. And the girl hadn't screamed!

He thought she would be glad to know that he was going out, and he wanted to tell her about it; but most of all his request to see her was dictated by the simple, childish, very masculine desire to be thanked and praised for what he had done. He enjoyed being praised and thanked, with a touching delight that told of a long-starved appetite, and he wanted all of such indulgences as he could justly claim. This girl, for whom he had really gone into danger, occurred to him as a probable source of more gratitude.

They conducted Red to the chief matron's office, and sent for Carrie Green. She came in presently, and Red, who had not seen the girl's face when he rescued her, had a shock of disappointment.

It is not easy to be pretty in a striped cotton dress much too big for the wearer, and as disadvantageously cut as is well possible. The prison style of hair-dressing is also trying. Carrie Green's face was white where it should have bloomed with color, and red and swollen about the eyes, where it should have been pale. Her expression was not pleasant, for she looked thoroughly sullen and unresponsive; she slouched and glowered.

Red wished himself out of the encounter, but his Irish blood came to his aid, and he delivered himself as gracefully as the circumstances allowed.

"I asked to see you, miss, to say good-by. I'm going out to-day, on account of what happened that night. The Governor pardoned me out—and me with a ten-spot only half through! I thought maybe you'd like to know about my luck. If I done anything for you—"

"Who says you did anything for me?" broke in the girl. Her eyes flashed once between the swollen lids. "You can go out or stay in; I should worry! It's nothing to me. I wish you'd gone out before the barracks burned down, that's all. If it hadn't been for you, my troubles would 'a' been over now—"

"Carrie, that's not the way to talk!" said the matron sharply. "You're a bad, ungrateful girl. Thank O'Brien nicely for saving your life, now, and then you'd better go."

Red had flushed deeply, his feelings profoundly hurt.

"It ain't necessary, ma'am," he said. "I didn't know she felt that way. I thought—well, it don't matter. I'll be going."

One gift prison had given Red—the gift of personal beauty. It had done this partly by fining an overheavy young jaw, but chiefly by bleaching away a bumper crop of big brown freckles that had made him—and, alas, would soon make him again—as speckled as a brook-trout. He had a cast of features, too, to which an expression of injured sulkiness is not unbecoming.

As he turned toward the door, Carrie looked at him again, and her heart suddenly melted.

"Oh!" she cried, stepping forward to detain him. "It was just as good of you! It was just as brave of you! I *am* glad you're going out, Mr. O'Brien. Only"—her chin trembled—"I'd honestly just as soon I'd burned up with the barracks. I'm going out, too, next week—"

"Well! That's good enough, ain't it? Then why—"

"There's nothing for me outside. I'd just as lief stay in. It's this way, Mr. O'Brien. I was one of these 'she wanted pretty things' girls, like you read about; only, being straight, I went out and got 'em for myself—hooked them out of the department-stores. I got caught. Since they put me away, my mother's died. I got a married sister that's never written or been to see me; and nobody else. When I get out, there won't be a soul to meet me, or care one way or another, only that Gert will probably be scared I'll come around to her place. She needn't be! Do you see why, now?"

"Look here!" said Red, acting on a swift impulse of pure pity. "I'll meet you myself."

"A lot you will!" replied the girl, incredulous.

"On the level!"

V

ACROSS the dull water the track of the sun, glimpsed through raveled clouds, lay like a polished streak on dirty silver. A dingy vessel drifted with seeming carelessness past the dock, stopped her engines, and let the tide drift her back to the landing-place. A few minutes later people began to pour off the boat. They looked much like any other not too prosperous crowd.

A red-haired young man with a light powdering of freckles over his fair-skinned, well-modeled face, wearing a new tan suit, a new straw hat, and new chocolate-colored shoes, stood and watched the women as they came off. His eye fell unrecognizingly on a small girl with a light, graceful figure, in a well-made dark-blue suit of ancient cut, and a floppy blue hat with pink roses on it. She had rich brown hair, and the wind had blown color into her cheeks and sparkle into her eyes. Red appreciated her silently, and was about to let his gaze drift past her in search of a far different figure, when their eyes met, and the girl's whole face broke into an enchanting, rapturous smile.

He stared. This little queen—it couldn't be Carrie! It was, though; she was rushing up to him now, catching his arm, telling him how she hadn't really thought he was really going to meet her, only she had been sure that he would!

Red had meant to be nice to her, but his task was very easy. He, too, considerate as his new employer had been to him, had not been unvisited during the past week by qualms of loneliness, by a sense that the big world had managed very well without him during the years in which he had been put away, and was profoundly indifferent to his return. Here, at last, was somebody to whom his presence mattered, somebody lonelier even than he, by so much as a woman's loneliness is always greater than a man's.

She was so pretty, in spite of her old-fashioned clothes, that the eyes of other men followed her as she walked along at Red's side.

"We'll eat right away," he said, with poignant memories of his own first meal outside, a week ago. "You'll be about



"WHAT'S THE MATTER, MR. O'BRIEN? WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?"

ready for some food, I shouldn't wonder, anything worthy of the name. Oysters?
after three years up there, never smelling Beefsteak—regular steak, with onions and

mushrooms? Go as far as you like, sister. I got my first week's pay to-day, and say, it was thirty dollars!"

Carrie chose fried oysters, followed by chocolate napoleons piled high with whipped cream. She explained that these cakes had haunted her dreams, as Red had been pursued by visions of more substantial eatables. They understood each other ecstatically; the sufferings they had passed through had suddenly become at once a joke and an indissoluble bond of sympathy.

After the meal he suggested a movie, but Carrie demurred.

"I don't want any door shut on me at all," she explained; "not even if I can open it when I want to. Can't we just go and walk up and down the avenue? It looks so pretty with all the flags and lights, and so many people."

"It seems like kind of a cheap entertainment," Red said.

He had spent his week of freedom in the country, and had not learned how far from cheap it is in these days to walk the crowded pavements of the city. In half a dozen blocks the pair were solicited in the name of as many worthy causes. Red dug up his quarters, as much for the impressing of Carrie as for any other sake, having no clear idea why French babies stood in special need of milk, or what strange thing a Thrift Stamp might be.

Meanwhile the girl stared fascinated about her, at the unfamiliar-looking crowds, the foreign uniforms, the gala aspect of the streets. She wanted to see everything, to hear everything.

"Oh, let's find out what he's saying!" she cried, as they reached the outskirts of a crowd clustered about a flag-draped car, from which a man was speaking. "Let's get as close as we can!"

VI

It was a recruiting-party, and the people made way for a husky youth who perhaps was going to enlist. Red and Carrie pushed to a point where they could hear every word, and gave their ears to the speaker.

He was an Englishman, fresh from the Somme front, a man who had known imprisonment in Germany and had fought through a corner of recovered France. He knew the things of which he had to tell, and he spared his audience little, only the matter-of-fact and British manner of his

recital somehow turning the edge of the horrors he related.

But Red's eyes and Carrie's, wide with consternation, drifted together as he talked, and their mouths hung open. They looked around them; the crowd drank in the soldier's tales, shuddered, exclaimed sometimes, but betrayed no incredulity. Red, simple fellow that he was, felt his face flush to hear some of these things in Carrie's company; at others his throat contracted and his heart began to pound.

There was music presently, the exciting, strongly accented music that descends direct from the tom-tom and sways the simplest soul. You do not need a musical ear to thrill to a military band.

"Let's go on," whispered Carrie.

Red hardly heard her. Another man was getting up now—a little man in an olive-drab uniform, who shouted a running exhortation to all and sundry to sign up with the colors. His amazingly big voice had the same stirring quality as the brass instruments.

"Come on now, men! Anybody that likes a good scrimmage had better enlist right now, because ten to one this is going to be the last war, you know, and if you miss this you may never have another chance! We're going to Berlin, we are. Who's coming along?"

Red had begun to tremble, very slightly, through all his powerful frame. He scarcely felt Carrie's hand on his arm. He was back in his hour again, caught once more into the triumphant exaltation that had been his as he fought at midnight with the clean and splendid thing that is fire.

The fight that beckoned now was a different and even nobler conflict, for it was waged against cruelty, savagery, and a huge, perverted will to crush, oppress, and conquer. Here the clean fire was all in the souls of the men who fought. Red felt the rush of it through his own breast, and his eyes turned, not to Carrie's, but to those of strangers in the crowd who evidently shared with him the startled inspiration of the call.

"What's the matter, Mr. O'Brien?" Dismayed, she tugged back upon his arm.

"What are you going to do?"

He was pushing forward, and he flung her one word only:

"Enlist!"

"Oh!" she wailed. "The only friend I got! What 'll I do?"

Her cry pulled Red momentarily out of his trance; he looked at her again with eyes that saw her. The poor, pretty kid! She had a claim on him, too.

He made a way out of the crowd for her, reached an empty stretch of pavement, and halted.

"Look here!" he said rapidly. "I like you, girly. I fell for you, strong and— and permanent, when you flashed that grin at me, getting off the boat. All the time I was feeding you oysters, I was thinking I'd like to buy all your oysters. I've been thinking I was getting thirty a week, and why shouldn't we get hitched, the sooner the better? Well"—his voice swung into an appeal that had been absent from his opening sentences—"you heard what that first fellow said! Can we forget them things, and settle down to thinking just about ourselves? Wouldn't you rather wait for me, and know you'd sent a man to fight for the flag? If you were lonesome, you'd know the girls that sent better men were lonesome, too. It would sort of join us up again—don't you see? We've been in wrong, you and me, Carrie. Don't you see this is our chance to get in right?"

She began to laugh hysterically.

"Do you know you're pleadin' with me to give you up, Red? And you haven't

stopped to find out yet whether I've got any use for you myself! Is this a proposal, or what is it?"

They belonged to a class that has learned to do without any great degree of privacy in its love-making, and he only swung her onto the dark door-step of a bank before he kissed her.

"Will you wait for me?" he begged. "Gee, you're sweet, kid! Will you wait for me?"

"I guess I'll have to," said Carrie.

She spoke sadly; but she, too, felt the wine of a new pride coursing along her veins. He was hers, this big fellow, to give to the need of a country that dimly, thrillingly, was revealing itself to-night as hers as well.

Under punishment, she had been a stormy atom in rebellion, charged with sullen hate, her hand against every one. The nation might have greeted her generously with gifts, on her release, and she would have hardened her heart. But instead it came asking of her her best and her all, and against the wonderful seduction of that she could not hold out.

She gave Red a little push.

"Go on over there and sign up!" she ordered him. "Whenever you get back you'll find me waiting!"